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# THE DEPOSITION OF MR. PARNELL.

BY JUSTIN MCCARTHY, M. P.

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THE cause of home rule for Ireland appeared during all the earlier and most even of the latter part of the last year to be moving on from steady success after success to a soon and complete triumph. The whole object of years of deliberate obstruction and also of deliberate self-sacrifice seemed to have been accomplished. The attention of the public of Great Britain had been aroused to the Irish claims. The democracy of England, Scotland, and Wales had been brought into cordial alliance with the Irish Home-Rulers. The whole Liberal party had made home rule the foremost plank in their platform. Mr. Gladstone had proclaimed it everywhere that the rest of his splendid political career was to be given up to the carrying of home rule. Victory after victory at the bye-elections had shown that the constituencies of Great Britain everywhere were won round to the home-rule cause. There was not a reasonable man on either side of the field who did not feel quite satisfied that the result of the next general elections would be to bring into power a government pledged first of all to home rule. The Irish Parliamentary party were acclaimed by everybody as an example of discipline and unity never seen before in any of the constitutional struggles of Europe.

The change was sudden. The Irish Parliamentary party is split in two,—the small minority following Mr. Parnell; the majority having formally deposed him from his place as leader. The Tories are triumphant and exultant. The Liberals, who were longing two months ago for a general election, now pour forth fervent, although mostly silent, prayers that the dissolution may be long postponed. *The Times* newspaper praises Mr. Parnell, and says the cause of home rule is dead and buried, for our generation at all events. I do not remember any such sudden catas-

trophe of change taking place in the fortunes of a man, a political party, and a national movement.

In the comments I have to offer it will naturally be assumed that I am putting merely the case for the majority of the Irish Parliamentary party—for the men who have by their votes and their voices deposed Mr. Parnell from that position of Parliamentary leadership which he had held so long and in which he had rendered so much service to his country. I say frankly that the assumption is quite correct: all I propose to do is to state to the best of my power the case for the majority of the Irish party. It is my firm conviction that the majority of the party acted wisely and patriotically; and not only patriotically and wisely, but also consistently. I say this with full recollection and recognition of the fact that we re-elected Mr. Parnell to the leadership of the party on the day of the opening of Parliament, November 25, and that the majority set on foot a meeting of the party for his deposition a day or two after.

Let us follow the process of events. The trial of the O'Shea divorce case came on a few days before the meeting of Parliament. To the surprise of almost every one, the case was undefended. What was the Irish Parliamentary party to do? Were its members to throw over a leader who had rendered them splendid service merely because an action in the divorce court had been allowed to go undefended against him? I say at once that I do not think the Irish party were bound to make on such grounds any such sacrifice. We were all the less inclined to make it because of the coarse and savage way in which certain writers and preachers in England broke into rabid denunciations not only of Mr. Parnell, but of the men who were associated with him, and even of the country which had given him birth. To read some of these leading articles and these sermons, one might have supposed that Mr. Parnell had invented the sin of adultery and had poisoned with it a previously sound and sinless world. One might have supposed, too, that the Irish people were the only people who had ever consented to be led by any but a Sir Galahad.

But as the days went on it began to be more and more evident that the outcry against Mr. Parnell was something much more serious than the mere scream of hysterical prudery. To some of us it soon became apparent that if Mr. Parnell continued to be the leader of the Irish Parliamentary party, the cause of home

rule would be put in grievous danger. Now, I am an absolute believer in the necessity of recognizing and taking full account of forces in every political movement. I am not for wasting breath in declaiming about them or against them. I was not concerned, as many were, to raise the question whether a man's private character must be unsullied if he is to remain a political leader. I was not concerned in the speculation whether there were or were not men in leading places in the House of Commons whose private lives would not bear the scrutiny of the White-Ribbon Association. The great fact which concerned me was the fact of which I was becoming more and more conscious, that public opinion in these countries would not stand Mr. Parnell. Yet I must own that I was prepared to run some risk even to the cause and the country for the sake of a leader who had led us on to so many triumphs.

On Monday, November 24, the day before the opening of Parliament, I received a letter telling me that Mr. Gladstone would be coming to London that day and would wish to see me. I saw him, and he laid before me his views as to the effect of Mr. Parnell's continued leadership. These views were, as everybody now knows, that under such conditions it would be impossible for us to carry the next general elections, and that therefore home rule was gone for years—perhaps for a generation. Mr. Gladstone told me that under such circumstances he could have no hope of carrying home rule for us; that he could not expect such a prolongation of his life as would enable him to see the final victory. The loss of the general elections would mean, he pointed out, the postponement of home rule for at least the length of one Parliament—that is, for five or six years—and perhaps for much more. He told me he had been expecting some personal communication from Mr. Parnell. Why? Because he had any right to assume that Mr. Parnell was bound to communicate with him? Not at all; but because in 1882 after the murders in the Phoenix Park—at a time when Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Parnell were political enemies, and not political allies—Mr. Parnell wrote to him offering to retire from public life if Mr. Gladstone thought such a step would be of advantage to the cause of Ireland. Mr. Gladstone asked me if I knew whether he was likely to receive any such communication now. I could only say that I knew nothing whatever on the subject. Then he asked me to communicate his

view of the situation to Mr. Parnell, and, if necessary, to my colleagues of the Irish party.

Even still, I frankly own, I did not think the actual deposition of Mr. Parnell was necessary. Mr. Gladstone said nothing to me which led me to believe that he contemplated resigning the position of Liberal leader in the event of Mr. Parnell's persisting in the leadership of the Irish party. I presume that Mr. Gladstone had not then made up his mind to any such course. Therefore all that I had present in my mind was Mr. Gladstone's conviction that, if Mr. Parnell remained, the general elections would be lost. I still thought that the situation might be retrieved without the formal deposition of Mr. Parnell; that Mr. Parnell might be reëlected if he desired it, and might keep out of public life for a time, and that things might yet go well with us. Mr. Parnell, in full possession of all that Mr. Gladstone had told me, still declared that he would offer himself for reëlection as sessional chairman of the party. It is our custom to elect all our officers at the opening of every session, and we could not put off or delay the decision. We reëlected Mr. Parnell. My first serious doubt as to the wisdom of the course we had taken was called up in my mind when, to my great surprise, I saw Mr. Parnell enter the House of Commons—the debating chamber itself—and take his seat in his familiar place just as if nothing whatever had happened.

This was the day of the opening of Parliament. On the evening of that day we heard some rumor that Mr. Gladstone was about to issue a letter announcing his intention of retiring from the leadership of the Liberal party. We found, after some hurried inquiry, that this was true, and that the letter had been read to Mr. Parnell by Mr. John Morley—after the meeting of our party and the reëlection of all the officers. Then we found ourselves confronted with a new condition of things. No man in his senses could believe in the possibility of a speedy success for home rule without Mr. Gladstone as leader of the Liberal party. It is beyond all question that Mr. Gladstone's personal influence has been needed and taxed to the full to carry with him some of his influential colleagues on this question of home rule. Men like Lord Spencer, John Morley, Shaw Lefevre, Stansfeld, and others are, of course, convinced and ardent Home-Rulers; but there are others who have accepted home rule simply because Gladstone said it was right. Now, we might “resolute till the

cows come home," but we could not carry home rule in the English Parliament without the help of one of the great English Parliamentary parties.

Mr. Parnell has lately compared himself to Wellington and Washington and other great soldiers and conquerors. Washington and Wellington were very great men, but neither of them could have carried his cause to victory without the aid of certain numbers of men to do the fighting. If we of the Irish party had absolutely the whole Irish representation, that of the University of Dublin included, in our hands, we should still be but a miserable minority in the British Parliament. One might as well tell Washington and Wellington to go in and win without cannon, bayonets, and powder as tell an Irish Parliamentary party to go in and win home rule without the votes of either Liberals or Conservatives.

After years and years of a policy specially designed and conducted to that end, we had won over the support of the great Liberal party of England, Scotland, and Wales. We had won over to our side the greatest Parliamentary orator, the most influential Parliamentary leader, of our time. More than that, we had had to surrender in our desperate struggle all the weapons by which we had been enabled to make the struggle effective. We went in for the rousing-up of the people—above all, the democracy—of Great Britain. We had faith in our cause. We believed that, if we could only obtain a hearing for that cause, it must succeed. We resolved to make England hear it; and our only possible platform for such a purpose was the House of Commons. Therefore we started our policy of obstruction. We said, If Parliament and the English people will not hear us, they shall hear nothing else. We succeeded—we compelled a hearing—and the hearing compelled conviction. But we had to sacrifice our weapon of obstruction. Parliament took fright at the use we had made of it, and abolished the rules and forms which enabled a small, a numerically-insignificant, minority to hold the immense majority at bay. Never again can a small party in the House of Commons do the work that we once did.

Therefore, when we heard that Mr. Gladstone believed he could do nothing more for us, and must give up the fight, we at once called to mind the fact that it was for us not merely the going-back to the position of ten years ago, but the going to a

very much worse and weaker position. We felt that we should be like poor Hector when he has allowed himself to be deprived of his sword and armor, and is confronted with the enemy whom under the very best of conditions he could scarcely hope to master. Still we did not think of absolutely deposing Mr. Parnell. We desired to confer with him upon the actual facts. We desired to hear from him what, under these new conditions, he deliberately proposed to do. We assumed that any patriotic man would have said under the circumstances: "I will not stand in the way. If my leadership threatens to be fatal to the present chances of home rule, I will at once withdraw from a position in which I can only be a peril to my country." Therefore we summoned by formal requisition a meeting of the party—summoned it after the regular and ordinary fashion—in order that a resolution might be proposed which invited Mr. Parnell simply to reconsider his position. We hoped even still that he would be a help to us, and not a hindrance.

Now, the policy of Mr. Gladstone in issuing his letter has been much criticised in Ireland. It was precipitate, some people say; he might on a question of such great importance have more fully consulted Irish opinion before he made up his mind. I am not much concerned to argue or to enter on this dispute. I have, as a party man, nothing to do with it. If Achilles determines to withdraw from the fight, the one fact which concerns me, a poor ally of the Greeks, is that Achilles is withdrawing from the fight and that we must see whether we can get on without him or not. It will be of some historic interest years hence to consider whether Mr. Gladstone might not well have given us a little more time. But at the moment, and even still, that did not seem to me a matter to make much talk about. I do not deny that it might properly occupy the attention of those who were mere outsiders and lookers-on; but I say that we who were in the fight had little or nothing to do with it. What we had to face was the fact that Mr. Gladstone had made up his mind under certain conditions to withdraw from public life. I may say, however, that I fully believe Mr. Gladstone had no alternative. Strong as he is in the affections of his people, he could not have stood up against the storm of public opinion if he had endeavored to continue in alliance with Mr. Parnell.

Mr. Parnell soon made it quite clear that he was determined

not to resign. I need not refer at any length to the early struggles in committee-room No. 15, or to the futile negotiations in which Mr. Parnell induced us to engage. The one great central fact of the new situation was the issue of Mr. Parnell's manifesto. When that letter appeared in print, most of his colleagues felt that all was over. We saw no possibility of leadership in the man who had written and published such a letter. It began by accusing the majority of his own colleagues of having been corrupted by the wire-pullers of the English Liberal party. Only think of it,—the very men—he named some of them in the committee-room—who had fought the great battles of the party with him, and more often still without him, in the worst and darkest parts of the struggle! The party—I say it deliberately, and I speak as one who knows and must know—could never have been kept together without the energy, the eloquence, the inexhaustible patriotic fervor and patience of these men. Their one great desire was to let no hint ever reach the public that they were sometimes dissatisfied with their leader. Their resolve was that in the face of the enemy there should be no mutiny seen, no murmur heard, in the national ranks.

The manifesto began with this attack on these men. It then went on to attack Mr. Gladstone and Mr. John Morley, to accuse them of having abandoned the cause of Ireland, and to assure the world that Mr. Parnell had learned this fact at his interview with Mr. Gladstone at Hawarden just a year before;—and he had kept this most momentous discovery a secret from his colleagues for a whole year. He had allowed us to go about the country in all directions glorifying Gladstone as the hope and safety of the Irish race. He had done the same thing himself—he had time after time declared that he had the most perfect confidence in Mr. Gladstone. He had done this as lately as last June, six months after the Hawarden interview. He had called Mr. Gladstone “our leader”—which no Irish member but Mr. Parnell ever had done, for much as we admire Mr. Gladstone, and profound as is our gratitude to him, we do not admit that any leader of an English party can ever be the leader of the Irish people.

Take it what way one might, this manifesto made it clear to most of us that Mr. Parnell was henceforward impossible as a leader. Suppose his recollection of the conversation at Hawarden were correct: then what a snare he had led his whole party into!



He knew a year ago that Gladstone would not bring in any home-rule scheme which the Irish people could possibly accept—and he had never told a word of this to his colleagues ; he had, in fact, told them the very opposite. Suppose his recollection was inaccurate,—“curiously the reverse of the truth,” to adopt a phrase of Carlyle’s,—what manner of leader could he be who could fall into such hopeless confusion and mistake ? In any case, where is the English party which could ever again enter into any confidential understanding with such a man ? Mr. Gladstone says that Mr. Parnell’s account of the conversation is utterly inaccurate, and that Mr. Parnell and he parted in the most complete understanding and agreement as to the principles of the home-rule measure. Mr. Gladstone says that Mr. Parnell is utterly wrong about the police question, about the question of representation at Westminster, about everything concerning which he has made a statement in his manifesto. Mr. Morley, for his part, says just the same thing. It is not for me to discuss the relative credibility of the different statements, but it is evident, at all events, that Mr. Parnell could not have been accurate when he publicly declared that Ireland could trust Gladstone on the home-rule question, and afterwards when he publicly declared that he knew all the time that Gladstone was not to be trusted.

The manifesto, I think I ought to say, did not come upon me by surprise. Mr. Parnell told me he was going to publish it, and gave me a general idea of what its contents were to be. I remonstrated as strongly as I could against any such publication, and I prevailed on Mr. Parnell to delay its issue for one day ; this was all the delay I could obtain. Mr. Parnell afterwards invited me to the house of a colleague in London to hear the manifesto read. I objected, of course, to the whole thing from beginning to end, and I told him and his friends that I firmly believed its publication would render reconciliation impossible. That is exactly what its publication did. The conviction was brought home to the minds of most of us that the man who published such a statement was absolutely unfit for any position of leadership. The English people had been slowly, but very steadily, growing into sympathy and affection for the Irish people. Suddenly the man who claims to be the leader of the Irish race breaks into a shrieking denunciation of the English people and the English leaders, and does his very best to rekindle all the fierce and destructive fires of race

hatred which we had all believed to be happily extinguished. And what was the object of all this ? Simply to maintain himself in the position of leader of the Irish Parliamentary party—in the sessional leadership of the party !

We, the majority of that party, had no power to depose Mr. Parnell from the leadership of the Irish people. Only he himself and the Irish people could do that—as he and they have, in fact, since done. But we could not do it. The only place in our gift was that of sessional chairman of the Irish party—a place for which there is an election at the opening of every session. We did not propose to expel him from Parliament and public life. We have no power to do anything of the kind. If Mr. Parnell's presence in public life were so necessary for the salvation of Ireland that it was worth throwing over Gladstone and the English people to secure it, surely such a man must be powerful enough to command in politics even though he had ceased to be sessional chairman of the Irish Parliamentary party. The truth is that, from whatever cause, under whatever pressure of feeling, Mr. Parnell appeared suddenly to have changed his whole nature and his very ways of speech. We knew him before as a man of superb self-restraint—cool, calculating, never carried from the moorings of his keen intellect by any waves of passion around him—a man with the eye and the foresight of a born commander-in-chief. We had now in our midst a man seemingly quite incapable of self-control ; a man ready at any moment and on the smallest provocation to break into a very tempest and whirlwind of passion ; a man of the most reckless and self-contradictory statements ; a man who could condescend to the most trivial and vulgar personalities, who could encourage and even indulge in the most ignoble and humiliating brawls.

I do not refer to anything that was said or done at the Kilkenny election, for we had made our decision on the events that occurred before that election. I say that even if the divorce case had never occurred, even if the manifesto had never been written, what we heard and saw in committee-room No. 15—supposing those meetings called together for some other reason than the divorce court and the Gladstone letter and the Parnell manifesto—would have convinced most of us concerning the necessity of a change in the leadership. I do not take back one single word of anything I have ever spoken or written as to the capacity for

leadership which Mr. Parnell has shown in the past. I am only too well aware of the great ability for fighting a losing cause which he showed in committee-room No. 15. But the fighting power which he displayed in the committee-room was the power of a gladiator and not that of a leader. I can admire the qualities of a gladiator, but when a man becomes a mere gladiator, I will not serve under him as a commander-in-chief.

I indorse all that I have ever said about Mr. Parnell's services in the past. I say that when he was among us there was no man on the whole equal to him. But then, I cannot forget the fact that he was not very often among us, and that it was sometimes very hard indeed to get within hearing of him when a crisis was at hand. The English Liberals would not have endured even Mr. Gladstone as a leader for a single year on such conditions. We were willing to endure almost anything rather than find public fault in the face of the enemy with a leader gifted with such rare gifts and crowned with such splendid successes. But I may ask any one who knows anything about our struggle where the Irish Parliamentary party would have been years and years ago but for men like William O'Brien, John Dillon, Thomas Sexton, and T. M. Healy.

Mr. Parnell justifies his persistence in holding out against the majority of the Irish party, and, as I believe, against the Irish people, on the ground that he is the only man who can save Ireland. I have myself a general distrust of self-proclaimed saviours of society. When a mortal creature is sent to be a saviour of society or anything else, he generally does not know it and goes about his great work because he cannot help it, modestly and unconsciously. When Mr. Parnell did his best, his very best, work for Ireland, he never talked about his being the only man who could save the country, and probably never had a thought of the kind in his head. I cannot think so poorly of Ireland and Ireland's national cause as to believe that the hopes and the life of both are dependent on the brain-pan of one man. I do not attribute to Mr. Parnell any deliberate or conscious egotism or self-seeking in all this. "A man," says Victor Hugo, "may be wrecked as is a ship. Conscience is an anchor; but it is terrible as true that like the anchor conscience may be dragged away." I think Mr. Parnell unconsciously allowed his political conscience to be dragged away. He asked again and again what had caused

the crisis—what but Mr. Gladstone's letter? The answer was plain—Mr. Parnell was himself the crisis. He had made himself the crisis—first in the divorce court, next in the manifesto, and finally in committee-room No. 15. We had seen individual authority rise to dictatorship, and the reverence for dictatorship degenerate with some into an absolute fetich worship. The time came at last when we were forced to act. For every one of us the decision was a cruel wrench—a pain never to be forgotten. But the decision had to be taken. We put it off and allowed it to be put off as long as we could, but at last we had to face it. It was made difficult by old allegiance, old friendship, old memories. But the principle of the decision was clear enough, and we saw it.

There was no choice for us between one policy and another; there was no choice for us between one leader and another. Before us lay the deep and dreadful decision between the rescue of our country's fructifying hopes and a slavish adherence to the man who can never now help us to fulfil those hopes, the man who sowed the seed and then blighted the harvest. Yet it was no light choice, nor was it lightly made. Ireland can say now whether she knows herself to be first in the hearts and minds of the men who made it. "After me the deluge," is an intelligible saying—"with me the deluge" was the invitation which Mr. Parnell seemed to offer to his country. "Hold to me and let us be ruined together, cause, country, and all." We did not feel tempted by such a proposition. Nothing but the course we took could have prevented the indefinite delay of the measure that is vital to Ireland's prosperity and progress.

No man's past services make him worth the prolongation of a state of things in which thousands of our people may die in despair, or, worse still, be born into misery, while there are yet helping hands willing, eager, and near to bring succor to a cause that has never before been so near to success. We have been accused, when all is said and done, of nothing worse than a determination to sacrifice, if needful, the political eminence of a man rather than submit to the ruin of a national cause. I think I may say for myself and my colleagues, in the memorable words of Burke's famous Bristol speech, that "in every accident that may happen through life, in pain, in sorrow, in depression and distress, we shall call to mind this accusation—and be comforted."

JUSTIN MCCARTHY.